



King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1177/0268580916655970a](https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580916655970a)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Li, E. C. Y. (2016). Book Review: Raewyn W Connell and Rebecca Pearse, *Gender: In World Perspective*. *INTERNATIONAL SOCIOLOGY*, 31(5), 605-607. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580916655970a>

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Book Review: Raewyn W Connell and Rebecca Pearse, *Gender: In World Perspective*

Raewyn W Connell, Rebecca Pearse, *Gender: In World Perspective* (3rd edn), Polity: Cambridge, 2015; x + 184 pp.: ISBN 9780745680712, £50.00 (hbk), 9780745680729, £15.99 (pbk)

Reviewed by Eva Cheuk-Yin Li, King's College London, UK

Keywords

Ecofeminism, feminism, gender, global sociology

Gender, like many areas of sociological investigation, has been increasingly critiqued for its bias towards theories and experience produced in the West. Being influenced by disciplines such as anthropology and cultural studies as well as intellectual movements such as feminism, queer theory, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism, there has been a strong impulse within sociology to decenter Western gender knowledge for a more comprehensive understanding of human society. The third edition of *Gender: In World Perspective*, which builds upon the diverse theoretical framework and rich literature reviewed in previous editions, is a fascinating contribution to this paradigmatic shift. In this new edition, pioneer Raewyn Connell is joined by Rebecca Pearse to include a new chapter on environmental justice and rearrange the prior chapters.

This book aims to address three questions: (1) How do we understand gender in the contemporary world? (2) How do particularities in time and space shape gender relations and orders differently? (3) In what direction is gender changing? To begin with, this is not a conventional textbook that begins with dogmatic definitions of gender. It starts with an assortment of examples to highlight the relevance of gender in every realm of social life, followed by a multidimensional conceptualization of gender. Readers are then invited to consider five carefully chosen examples from across the globe. Instead of calling for a universal 'world perspective,' the authors underscore the situated, contextualized, and dynamic nature of gender as a social structure.

Chapter 3 and 4 are relatively theoretical compared with the rest of the book. These two chapters have been rearranged to facilitate easier reading. The authors first reject the taken-for-granted commonsensical position of sex difference proliferated by pop psychology. Drawing from the wider scholarship of psychological research, they persuasively contend that the two sexes are more similar than different with each other and hence debunk the essentialized relation of gender and reproductive difference. Carefully examining the shortcomings of biological determinism and the poststructuralist view of the docile body, they

then propose understanding gender as social embodiment, which stresses body as both the agent and object of social practices. This approach resituates the body back within historical and social trajectories. It also lays the foundation for Chapter 4, which charts the significant historical development of gender theory in both the metropole and Global South. Using the insights of queer and postcolonial theory, the authors problematize the universalism of gender theory produced in the Global North by demonstrating how gender knowledges are embedded in different levels of political, economic, and social processes. The authors also observe an emerging divergence in research focus conducted in the metropole and the Global South. Whereas research in the former is increasingly geared towards abstract theoretical developments, research in the latter remains grounded in everyday struggles such as education and poverty. This fair evaluation must be considered by researchers in the metropole in particular, who should reflect on the research agenda and theoretical orientations of the past decades.

Chapter 5 sketches four interconnected areas of gender research, which are power and domination, production and consumption, emotional relations, and symbolism, culture, and discourse. Despite the fact that the categorization is not exhaustive (as admitted by the authors), this serves as a useful point of departure to configure the complex scholarship of gender. Chapter 6 progresses with the discussion of gender politics at the personal level. The authors are well aware that the concept of 'identity' was heavily influenced by social developments in Britain and the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. They are also mindful of the danger in embracing a generalized notion of destabilized identity. Supported by solid empirical research, they convincingly argue that in many non-Western societies before colonialism and globalization, gender was not conceptualized and developed as identities but as practices and relations. They further challenge gender dichotomy with a detailed discussion on transgender and transsexual, where relations between gender, sex, and the corporeal bodies are troubled.

The final two chapters address the macro dimensions of gender. Chapter 7 is new to this edition, and deals with the gendered dimension of environmental justice and explores the possibility of feminist sustainability in the global risk society. The authors first outline the development of ecofeminism, followed by the introduction of the powerful concept of 'maldevelopment,' which refers to the North's (neo)colonial expansion into the Global South through environmental exploitation, driven by global and green capitalism. The final chapter, Chapter 8, interweaves gender relations with the macro structure of economic, state, and global gender relations: how economic institutions such as transnational corporations have shaped new forms of masculinity, how state apparatus employs feminism to advance political agendas that are often paradoxically opposed to gender equality, and how gender mainstreaming in policy making faces obstacles in local situations. The authors do not avoid highly controversial issues such as the perpetuation of gender inequality in the name of religion and 'national culture.' They denounce these as the rhetorical play of privileged men and women who benefit from the patriarchal dividends. This book concludes with a call for

collaborative action for gender democratization, which the authors identify as the third way to gender equality between individual rebellion and de-gendering.

The overall strength of the book lies in its encapsulation of an impressive breadth of literature and reflexivity to democratize gender knowledges. The new chapter on environmental justice is a timely response to the gendered consequences of environmental exploitation under global capitalism. Throughout the book, Southern knowledge and research outside the global metropole are not treated as isolated ‘cases’ or a mere ‘addition’ to gender theory in the North. Knowledge from the Global South is presented as equally valid, and contributes to the understanding of the heterogeneity and dynamics of gender. Another thread running through the book is the emphasis on pleasure. Reconciling biological essentialism and social determinism, the authors reiterate the importance of individual agency in shaping subjective experience. For example, when discussing the powerful concept of gender socialization, the authors introduce the alternative account of embodied learning, which echoes the discussion of social embodiment (Chapter 3), to draw equal attention to structural constraints and individual agency, and to acknowledge pleasure in bodily performance. The authors also seek to complicate gender by pulling together the disparate theoretical trajectories of poststructuralism, postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, and queer theory. Nonetheless, there was room for further arguments. For example, the discussion of environmental justice would have benefited from a brief discussion on the digital gender divide that entrenches inequality in the Global South. The examination of global media and celebrity could have been supplemented by touching on the paradoxical relations between consumption and empowerment in postfeminist media culture in the North.

Overall, the authors have achieved the primary purpose of this book by thoughtfully delivering a world perspective on gender. With an exceptional balance between intellectual depth and readability, this new edition offers important insights into the complexity and diversity of gender. This book is suitable for students who desire a precise yet comprehensive introduction as well as researchers who look for an overview of gender knowledges.

Author biography

Eva Cheuk-Yin Li is a PhD candidate in film studies at King’s College London. She was trained in sociology at the University of Hong Kong. She has published in *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture*, *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, and *Transformative Works and Cultures*. Her research focuses on the interdisciplinary study of media and culture, gender and sexualities, and affect and fan labor in transnational and East Asian contexts. Address: Film Studies Department, Room G04, Norfolk Building, King’s College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, UK. Email: licy.eva@gmail.com